

# THE STORY OF THE FAIRY BEE

Illustrated by \_\_\_\_\_

BEFORE Nambi came to live on the Earth, when Kintu was quite alone, he made friends with a bumble-bee. There had been a great rainstorm, and the poor bee fell to the ground on his back and could not get up again, and the heavy raindrops beat on him and very soon he would have died of cold, but Kintu picked him up and held him in his warm hand, and soon the bumble-bee revived and said to Kintu: “You have saved my life; I will always be your friend and help you when you are in trouble.”

One morning he woke up and found that his cow was gone; he could not find it anywhere. Then the bumble-bee came to him and said: “I will help you find your cow; it has been stolen by the herdsmen of a wizard who lives on the Mountains of the Moon.”

So Kintu took his stick and set out on his long journey to the far-away mountains where the snow never melts, and the bumble-bee flew before him to show him the way. On they went, day after day, through dark forests and over wide rivers, and by narrow paths through the jungle grass, until they saw the Mountains of the Moon in the far distance.

Then the bumble-bee said: “Do everything that I tell you, for you will never be able to outwit the old wizard and his people by yourself, and if you do not prove yourself cleverer than they are, they will never give you back your cow.” When they arrived in the wizard’s country and the great mountains were towering above them, Kintu saw what a rich country it was—great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats, and beautiful gardens, and many people.

When the wizard heard that Kintu had arrived, he sent for him and said: “Are you really Kintu, the man who lives all alone with a cow?” And Kintu said: “Yes, I am, and your people have stolen my cow, and I have come to find it.”

Then the wizard wondered very much, and said to his people: “This is a very wonderful man; we will see what marvels he can do. How did he find his way from Uganda, and how did he know that you stole his cow while he was asleep, for there was no one to tell him? We will test him and see if he is really a wise man.” So they gave him a house to rest in, and said they would bring him some supper.

Kintu rested a little while, and then to his surprise, ten thousand people arrived, each carrying a basket of cooked food. "The wizard has sent you your supper," they said, and put down the ten thousand baskets.

"Thank them very much," whispered the bee in Kintu's ear, "and tell them to come back in a little while and fetch their baskets when you have finished your supper." So the people went away wondering very much. "Is it possible for one man to eat so much?"

Then the bee called all the ants in the country: the red ants which live in the forests and are always hungry, for they can eat a dead elephant if they find it; and the white ants who build big castles for themselves of red earth which look like huts on the hill-sides, and in the middle of the castle is a beautiful room with smooth walls where their Queen lives; and the large black ants which run very fast and lose their way every two minutes and run back again to find it; and the little black ants who are always silently watching everywhere, though one does not see them, and run out quickly to pick up a crumb or a seed or a grain of corn directly they see it on the ground. All these came, millions, and millions, and millions of them, and they carried away the food, until the baskets were all empty except one, which Kintu ate for his supper.

Then the people came back, and they shouted when they saw the empty baskets piled up together. “Can one man eat so much? This man is a wizard.” When the old wizard heard it he said: “Let him sleep, to-morrow we will give him another test.”

In the morning they brought him a brass axe and said: “Our chief likes rocks for his fire; go and cut firewood from the rocks and bring it tied up in bundles.” Then the bee flew before him as he climbed up the mountain-side and brought him to a rock that had been struck all into splinters by lightning, and he tied the splinters together with grass and returned, and all the people wondered very much, and said: “This must be Kintu, the man who lives by himself.”

Then they brought him a water-pot and said: “Our chief does not drink water, he only drinks dew. Go and fill this pot in the forest.” So Kintu climbed up the mountain, and this time the journey was very long; seven peaks they climbed and then they came to the bamboo forest. The bumble-bee flew before him and cheered him on and told the shivering bamboos who he was, and as he walked the bamboos whispered: “This is Kintu, let us help him; this is Kintu, this is Kintu.” Then the bumble-bee showed him a hole in a rock, and all the bamboos shook their branches at once, and the hole was filled with dew, and Kintu filled his water-pot and returned.

Then the old wizard laughed and said: “You are a marvellous man, I will not tease you any more; if you can recognize your cow in my herd, you shall take it and go home to Uganda.” So all the herds were collected, and Kintu was told to find his cow, and the bumble-bee flew before him as he made his way between the cows—thousands and thousands of cows, with long horns all standing upright. Then the bumble-bee alighted on the horn of a cow, and Kintu saw it was his old friend, and he drove it out of the herd and showed it to the wizard and his people and said: “This is my cow that they stole from me while I slept,” and he said good-bye to them, and the bumble-bee showed him the way home to Uganda.

And to-day if you go to the Mountains of the Moon and climb up to the bamboo forests, the trees will learn down to see you and whisper to each other: “This is Kintu, this is Kintu, this is Kintu!” for they remember the first man they ever saw, and think he has come back.